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ABSTRACT

In 1971 and 1972, the province of Quebec enacted legislation instituting a parental advisory committee in all schools in the province. The legislation mandated that parents become informed about school issues, disseminate information to the wider community, and provide school authorities with advice on educational decision-making. This study attempted to discover how well the requirements of the law were being carried out. The study used as data source a year's minutes of 11 school committees including 7 elementary and 4 secondary committees. The results indicate that the roles of the committees have been largely confined to the initial informational stage. Subsequent dissemination of information accounted for only about 5 percent of committee activities. When the number of recommendations made by committees to school authorities was analyzed, results indicated that advising authorities had the smallest area of committee activity. When initiation of issues was analyzed, it was found that administrators rather than parents accounted for over 66 percent of initiations in secondary school committees and over 42 percent of initiations in elementary committees. In sum, it seems likely that Quebec's parent advisory committees are operating in much the same way as the traditional "professionally-led" parent-teacher associations. (Author/JM)

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# PARENT ADVISORY COMMITTEES IN QUEBEC: AN EXPERIMENT IN MANDATED PARENTAL PARTICIPATION

Submitted for review to Interchange

by

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Theoretically, interest groups "infuse policy demands into the political system and thereby take the first step toward obtaining political outputs in response to these demands." (Engleman and Schwartz, 1967. p. 93). In relation to this systems view of the function of interest groups, parents' associations have not fared very well in the literature. Concerning the traditional parent-teachers' association (PTA) in particular, the familiar picture has been that of the "booster" society, thoroughly coopted by the school administrator, and serving mainly to provide a facade of democratic representation for decisions already made. Classical examples are provided in Vidich and Bensman's Small Town in Mass Society (1958: 1974-201) and in Dahl's Who Governs? (1961: 155-159). Dahl's conclusion about New Haven's PTA seems typical of the role attributed to this organization in the literature:

> Ostensibly, of course, a Parent-Teachers' Association is a democratic organization of parents and teachers associated with a particular school, brought into being and sustained by their joint interests. In practice, a PTA is usually an instrument of the school administrator. Indeed, an ambitious principal will ordinarily regard an active PTA as an indispensable means to his success. If no PTA exists, he will create one; if one exists he will try to maintain it at a high level of activity.

Similarly, Iannaccone (1965: 20) and Iannaccone and Lutz (1970: 7) saw PTAs as part of a "civic cocoon" or "webwork" of citizen groups, constituting a "professionally led influence structure" employed by school authorities in building consensus around educational policy issues, and ultimately conferring special political advantages upon the insiders in the local educational establishment. Moreover, in the case of the advocates of community control in urban educational systems, an almost sinister role seems to be attributed to the traditional PTA. According to Fantini, Gittell, and Magat (1970: p. 74), for example:

> P.T.A.'s are ridiculed for cake sales and preoccupation with trivia and sociability, but their effect is far more significant in the negative sense. They exist as an elaborate structure at the local, district, state and national levels, enrolling millions of members and putting forward the illusion of parent representation in public education. The effect of all this is regressive in a least two ways. First, it has often preempted or precluded the formation of other public groups with a direct policy role. Second, it has been supportive of the prevailing education order.

PTA's, in summary, have been depicted not only as failing to independently "infuse policy demands" into educational policy making, but also as serving in effect to block the infusion of such demands by more independent sources.

While this is probably not a fair picture of the initiative of local PTA members or of the political influence of the organization (for example, in promoting child welfare legislation), we have clearly seen in the sixties and seventies a strong reaction against this traditional form of school-sponsored parent representation, and the emergence of new and more independent forms, notably the "issue-oriented" community education interest group (CEIG). Excessive school tax rates, racial integration (in the U.S.), declining test scores, "back to the basics," and perceived lack of humanism in the schools are among the issues which have unified such groups in opposition to the educational "establishment." Perceiving themselves to be shut out of the educational policy process, such groups have made their demands known in a frequently confrontive fashion (e.g. Lusthaus et. al. 1976). They have been difficult for educators to coopt because the norms which were originally established were ones of conflict with the school authorities, and not cooperation.

In the seventies the emergence of a third type of CEIG may be identified. This type has been given its mandate by law to work with educators to improve programs. Called "School Advisory Committees" or "Parent Advisory Committees" (PAC's) these CEIG's are usually made up exclusively of parents and have been given a "watch dog" function over the adequacy of educational services. In the U.S., PAC's have been mandated by Federal programs; specifically, ESEA Title I, and PL 94-142, "Mainstreaming of the Handicapped." In Quebec the legislated parent advisory functions are concerned with all aspects of the school. The purpose of this paper is to more closely examine this emerging trend in CEIG formation.

More specifically, this study is concerned with the impact of PAC legislation in Quebec. Following an outline of the legal structure of the system in the province, the study will analyze data from 11 parent committees in order, first, to ascertain the present activities of parents engaged in parent committee work; second, to analyze how these activities are distributed in relation to the aims of the legislation; and, finally, to ascertain how the activities of the legislated PAC's compare with the traditional PTA and "issue-oriented" CEIG's. The purposes of the study, in short, are to compare actual outcomes of the legislation with intended outcomes, and to ascertain whether the legislated system demonstrates any distinctive differences with past practices in parent representation.

## THE LEGISLATED PAC SYSTEM IN QUEBEC

### Development of the Legislation

Recent educational developments in Quebec, including the legislated system of parental advisory committees, have been strongly influenced by the province's "blueprint" for educational reform, the 1961-65 Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education or "Parent Report" (chaired by Monsignor Alphonse Parent). Comments and recommendations promoting parental participation occur throughout the five-volume report, but particularly in Volume IV where the Commissioners specifically recommended a system of "school committees" for each public elementary and secondary schools in the province, to be elected annually by parents and community members.

In general, the parental participation recommendations of the Parent Commission reflected concern for protecting the religious and cultural rights of parents in choosing the type of education desired for their children; and for enlisting the understanding, support and participation of parents in reforms involving a more child-centered approach to school organization and curriculum.

Similarly, a subsequent commission concerned with school reorganization on the Island of Montreal (the 1968 "Pagé Report" chaired by Joseph L. Pagé) urged parental participation because parents "should be free to choose a school that is French or English, Catholic, Protestant, or pluralistic," and because "the success of educational reform depends to a great extent upon their attitude to the proposed structures." (pp. 28-29) With some modifications, the Pagé Report reiterated the school committee structure recommended by the Parent Commission.

Apart from the parental participation recommendations of various study commissions, it should be noted that parent organizations were in fact in existence and under development in the years leading up to the provincially legislated school committee structure. On the Protestant side of Quebec's confessional school system, home and school associations had existed since 1919, and in 1944 forty-five local associations formed The Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations. The Federation obtained a provincial charter in 1959, and in the subsequent years of Quebec's "Quiet Revolution" in education participated in planning and advisory commissions and submitted a number of briefs in relation to legislated reforms. On the Catholic side, parental involvement was less formally organized, but in 1965 the provinces largest Catholic school board, The Montreal Catholic School Commission, (M.C.S.C.) initiated a system of parent consultative committees with the particular aim of bridging the home-school gap in community areas containing populations of recent European ethnic origin. Introduced on an experimental basis, the committees grew from 13 in 1965 to over 350 six years later. (Parents Guide, M.C.S.C., 1975). Furthermore, organizational activities in the sixties included an effort by provincial authorities to promote a "cooperative school" concept, involving the establishment of "educational workshops" where parents could participate with educators in the implementation of organizational and curricular changes in the schools. (The Educational Workshop, 1967).

Structure of the System

The limited success of the latter voluntary approach may have been one of the reasons for the governments move in the early seventies to a mandated system of parent consultative committees accross the province. In any case, such a system was in keeping with the recommendations of the Parent and Pagé Commissions. Specifically, the legislation was introduced in 1971 and 1972 as part of a major programme of school district reorganization off the Island of Montreal (Bill 27) and on the Island (Bill 71). Each public school in the province, secondary as well as elementary, was to have a school committee, consisting of from seven to twenty-five parent representatives elected by a general assembly of parents at the beginning of each school year. Principals were given the responsibility of calling the general assembly in their schools and were included as members of the school committee, but without the right to vote or to be appointed chairman of the committee. Liaison with the individual school was further provided for by the inclusion of a teacher representative, but again without the right to vote or to have access to the chairmanship of the committee.

At the board level, the legislation established "Parents' Committees," consisting of the chairmen of the school committees in each district. Key functions of these committees were "to ensure such cooperation as is necessary for the proper operation of school committees," and "to express to the school board such needs as are identified by the school committees and direct recommendations of a general scope to it." Furthermore, where districts were large enough to be organized into administrative regions (as in the case of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal with five regions and the Montreal Catholic School Commission with seven regions), the legislation established regional parents' committees, consisting of the school committee chairmen in an administrative region, and a central parents' committee at the central board level, consisting of representatives of the regional parents' committees.

Action and Reaction

Thus, as one newspaper report at the time put it, "parent power" had become law in the Province of Quebec. (Pellegrino, The Gazette, 1972). In the politics of education in Quebec, however, it would be difficult to imagine any governmental action occurring without a vigorous reaction, and this legislation tapped a fundamental controversy in the province's not-so-quiet educational revolution. From one perspective it could be seen as a basic guarantee of a parental voice in the schools and, hence, as a necessary counterbalance to the growing centralization of educational policy-making in the province; but from another, since the rules of the game were after all being laid down by the central authority, it could be seen as just another governmental take-over, posing in this instance as an exercise in participatory democracy.

Justification for both perspectives can be found in the guidelines and regulations prepared for the implementation of the legislation. (Mission 27, 1972). On the one hand, for example, the question as to what are the proper areas for parental involvement and consultation is left largely to the discretion of the local parent committees and the schools: "It will rest with the school committee and the parents' committee to decide on the areas of their studies and participation". (Mission 27, p. 17). Suggested areas range from traditional supportive activities (such as organizing and assisting in field trips) to policy advisory activities (such as in the distribution of students in the schools of a district). The advantages of this flexibility are seen as follows in a guide prepared by Quebec's largest school district, The Montreal Catholic School Commission:

> The community is therefore left free to choose the topic for consultation. As the dialogue between the parents and the school board will develop, more specific questions which will be the object of a systematic consultation will be determined (such as the closing of schools, the organization of lunch service in elementary schools). Thus the committees will know ahead of time the items on which to focus their efforts at consultation meetings. But a list of subjects for consultation will always be an incomplete list considering that it is impossible to foresee all the changing situations which give rise to consultation needs

among the public. (Parents' Guide, M.C.S.C., 1975, p. 9.)

Choice of topic, in other words, provides a basis for continuous dialogue with school authorities, and in this way parents committees might be expected to heighten the school's awareness of local needs, to heighten their own awareness of issues requiring parent consultation, and, in general, to build their participatory skills and to exercise an increasing influence upon school affairs.

On the other hand, the key rule of the game according to the guidelines and regulations is that the committees are to be "cooperative" and "complementary".

> School committees and parent committees must be defined within the school structure as organizations cooperating with school administrators and school boards. They are to be complementary structures without encroaching upon the duties and authority of school commissioners and administrators. (Mission 27, p. 10).

It doesn't seem to have occurred to the authorities that input may be useful by dint of being noncomplementary and even non-cooperative at times (e.g. the parliamentary function of a "loyal opposition"), and the question thus arises whether the committees are intended to be anything more than the familiar "instruments of the school administrator," as characterized by Dahl.

Moreover, the rules of consultation are certainly cautious. Three stages in decision-making are identified: preparing for a decision; making the decision; and carrying out and assessing the decision. (Mission 27, pp. 14-15). In the first stage, parents might be involved either in the capacity of reviewers or initiators; for example, they may be asked by the principal for their comments and suggestions concerning a program of educational visits proposed by the principal, or, on the other hand, they may themselves propose such a program having heard of it in a neighbouring school. In the second stage of actually making the decision, however, parents are not to be involved; here the school authority decides whether the program proposed by the parents is acceptable.

> Duties assigned to parents' committees and school committees by Bill 27 (1971) place the cooperation of such committees at the first stage of participation. This cooperation does not come at the second stage since decision-making belongs to the "legislator" (the school board) or to its delegate (the school administration) and returns occasionally in the third stage. (Mission 27, p. 15).

In the third stage of carrying out and assessing decisions, as the above quote indicates, parents may be occasionally involved depending upon the nature of the decision, but this stage "does not take on the same importance as at the first level where parents can have decisions brought into line with their main concerns." (Mission 27, p. 16.)

Another element of caution which is clearly evident in this decision-making "model" and throughout the regulations and guidelines concerns parental qualifications for participation. Advice must be "meaningful" and where the experiences of participation of parents in school life are few or non-existent,

> ... it would probably be opportune for the school committee and parents' committees to attach special attention to their information role and devote an important part of their activities to it. To inform themselves and contribute to informing the parents of their area would thus be the immediate preoccupation. In other areas, having already experimented with various forms of participation the accent may be placed on the animation of the public either or consultation. (Mission 27, p. 13.)

The process, in summary, is that committee members themselves first become informed; and subsequently are able to serve as an information channel to the rest of the community; and finally are prepared to give advice to the school authorities (Mission 27, pp. 12-13). While it is difficult to disagree with the rationality of hinging advice upon relevant knowledge, it is a process which ultimately leaves the key to participation in the hands of the school authorities since their definition of relevant knowledge seems bound to be the dominant one. Parents, in short, are asked to <u>persuade</u> the authorities with valid arguments, which, in turn, may be largely based upon information supplied by the same authorities.

> The role of the parents is limited to their influence on decisions. This influence will depend on the quality of the recommendations

> which may be made with regard to one aspect or another of school life. (Mission 27, p. 20).

All of this, too, is expressed in a context which stresses the legal framework of authority and the parents' role within that framework:

> ...it must be remembered that school administrators are governed by regulations drawn up from school board policies and instructions. The school boards, in turn, must abide by the laws and regulations enacted by the Government and the Minister of Education. (Mission 27, p. 15).

Without much difficulty, an elaborate scheme of control and cooptation could be read into these and other features of the parent committee legislation. However, analysis of an ambiguous text for the substantiation of a position is of limited use or validity, and perhaps the best that can be said about the legislation is that it is a mixture of rights, which have the potential for building parent power, and of responsibilities, which have the potential for restricting and diminishing that power. The intriguing question for the researcher concerns the kinds of behaviours, anticipated and otherwise, which have emerged from the plans (or schemes) of the legislators, and the remainder of this study will deal with that question.

## SETTING OF THE STUDY

The setting for this study was a predominantly suburban school system located near Montreal. The system is comprised of one Regional High School Commission and two "feeder" elementary school commissions. In all the school system enrols approximately 12000 students. This study was concerned with one of the elementary school commissions, consisting of ten schools and an enrolment of 2200, and the high school commission, consisting of five schools and an enrolment of 6000.

In common with many school systems in and around the Montreal area, this system has experienced increasing politicization in the 1970's. In fact, many administrators and board members outside the district view these three school commissions as "front runners" in the political debates among commissioners,

teachers, and administrators. The minutes of the school committee meetings during the years 1976-1977 are reflective of periods of educational political action on the part of these three basic educational groups. The years, in short, were action years.

## METHODOLOGY

To obtain the data regarding the major questions of the study, the minutes of the school committees were analyzed. Specifically, one full calendar year of minutes was obtained from seven out of ten schools in the elementary commission and from four out of five schools in the adjoining high school commission. The four schools not included in the population were eliminated because of incomplete minutes.

A content analysis technique was used to analyze the minutes of each meeting. Each specific entry* in the minutes was analyzed to ascertain (1) the content of the entry; (2) the content of the entry in relation to the school committee legislation; (3) the initiator of the entry.

Concerning the content of entries, the following six types of issues were evident in the data and were used as categories:

- Pedagogical issues - the entry deals with the administration of the curriculum and evaluation (e.g., report cards, examination arrangements).
- Administrative issues - the entry deals with administrative matters which are non-pedagogical in nature (e.g., janitorial services, school busses, school budget).

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* It should be noted that the study only addresses the issue of quantity of entries in the specific categories. Thus, quantity is viewed as a surrogate measure for importance, though there are limitations to this assumption.

- Teacher issues - the entry deals with conditions concerning teachers (e.g., collective negotiations).
- Student issues - the entry deals with student activities and behaviour (e.g., social activities, discipline).
- Group Procedure issues - the entry deals with the procedures of the school committee itself (e.g., meeting dates, organization of sub-committees).
- Provincial policy issues - the entry deals with a government policy, past, present, or projected (e.g., the language legislation in Quebec, Bill 101).

Secondly, with regard to the analysis of entries in relation to the school committee legislation, the study applied the three general categories of parent involvement or school committee roles as stated in the legislation. As quoted from "Mission 27" (pp 12-13), the official document which interprets the legislation, these are:

a) Information

> Parents are often distraught by our school system. This leads to feelings of fear and frustration that increase as the system becomes more complex. They are neither able to understand nor identify themselves with the system.
> One of the main concerns of school committees and parents' committees should be to understand and become familiar with the system. Grouped together into school and parents' committees and on the strength of information provided by school management and school boards, parents will be in a better position to state their thoughts and desires.

b) Community interest and involvement

> With their background material and school life and school boards, school and parents' committees may become the principal means by which information concerning school life is disseminated at the community level, and, in so doing, assist school administrators and school boards in their work. They will thus promote community understanding, interest and involvement and help develop a common awareness of needs and aspirations.

c) Consultation

> The foregoing two activities will enable parents' and school committees to provide meaningful advice to school administrators and school boards. Consultation thus becomes the focal point of all parents' and school committee activities and the culminating point of their cooperation towards the improvement of school life. In the last analysis, this improvement rests on constant and efficient communication between parents and school authorities.

Finally, with regard to the initiators of entries, four categories were used: Administrator of the school; Other Non-Voting member (i.e., teacher representative, district resource personnel, guest, etc.); Parent member; and "unable to distinguish".

Methodologically, it should be noted that the unit of analysis of the study was the "theme" (Berelson quoted in Kerlinger, 1964, pp. 544-553). A theme in this study referred to an entry in the minutes which was either related to the legislated categories of parent involvement described above or was a part of group maintenance activities. As Kerlinger (1964, p. 549) stresses in reference to Berelson's treatment of content analysis, if the themes are complex, content analysis using the theme as the unit of analysis is difficult and perhaps unreliable. Therefore, a coder check for reliability was used in this study. Using a Pearson correlation, the inter-reliability of ten percent of the entries was .74. This was considered acceptable for the analysis.

The limitations of the data source also need to be recognized. First, minutes are the product of one person, of one "eye" on events. To some degree, this single point of view was broadened by amendments to minutes, made in subsequent meetings and endorsed by the total group. Secondly, the comprehensiveness of minutes varied from recorder to recorder. While the minutes of some committees were relatively condensed, others were more elaborate. One problem of the condensed record is that it may hinder the identification of initiators of issues, frequently by using the collective "we". Thirdly, the written records of the meetings frequently omitted reference to intermediate steps or discussions which could have shed more light on the functioning of

the group. Thus, a common occurrence was the "disappearance" of issues; that is following discussion and suggested action, a particular issue might not appear again in the record of later meetings. Finally, minutes do not capture the intensity or emotional aspects of meetings. In spite of these limitations, the use of minutes as a data source is well-documented (e.g., Scribner, 1966).

## RESULTS

The results of the study are reported in relation to the three levels of analysis described in the methodology: (1) the content of the entries; (2) the content of the entries in relation to the school committee legislation; (3) the initiators of entries. The first level of analysis provides a broad indication of what school committees "do". The second breaks down their activities in relation to the three legislated school committee roles: The Informational Role; The Community Interest and Involvement Role; and The Consultation Role. The third also bears upon the roles of the committees. Specifically, it was assumed in the study that the consultation role would be reflected in the degree to which parents, as the only voting members of the committees, actually initiate school committee activities.

Three graphs are used to illustrate the results. It should be explained that the total number of entries in the final graph (Figure 3, Initiators of Activities) is less than that for the content graphs (Figures 1 and 2), first, because an initiation may relate to more than one area of activity. For example, where an elementary school administrator announced a visit for the pupils and at the same time called for parent volunteers and funding for this activity, three entries would be made in Figure 1 (in the areas of Information, Parent Volunteers, and Fund Raising), but only one entry would be made in Figure 3 in the administrator initiator category. Secondly, the total number of initiators is smaller because it was not possible to include initiators of group procedures. In most cases, group procedural activities occurred in the

minutes as a part of regular procedures and were not specifically identifiable according to the initiator.

Finally, it should be noted that the presentation of the group data does accurately present between-school variances as well as within-group variances. That is, this study found a similar range of responses across school sites as it did within school sites.

Content of Entries

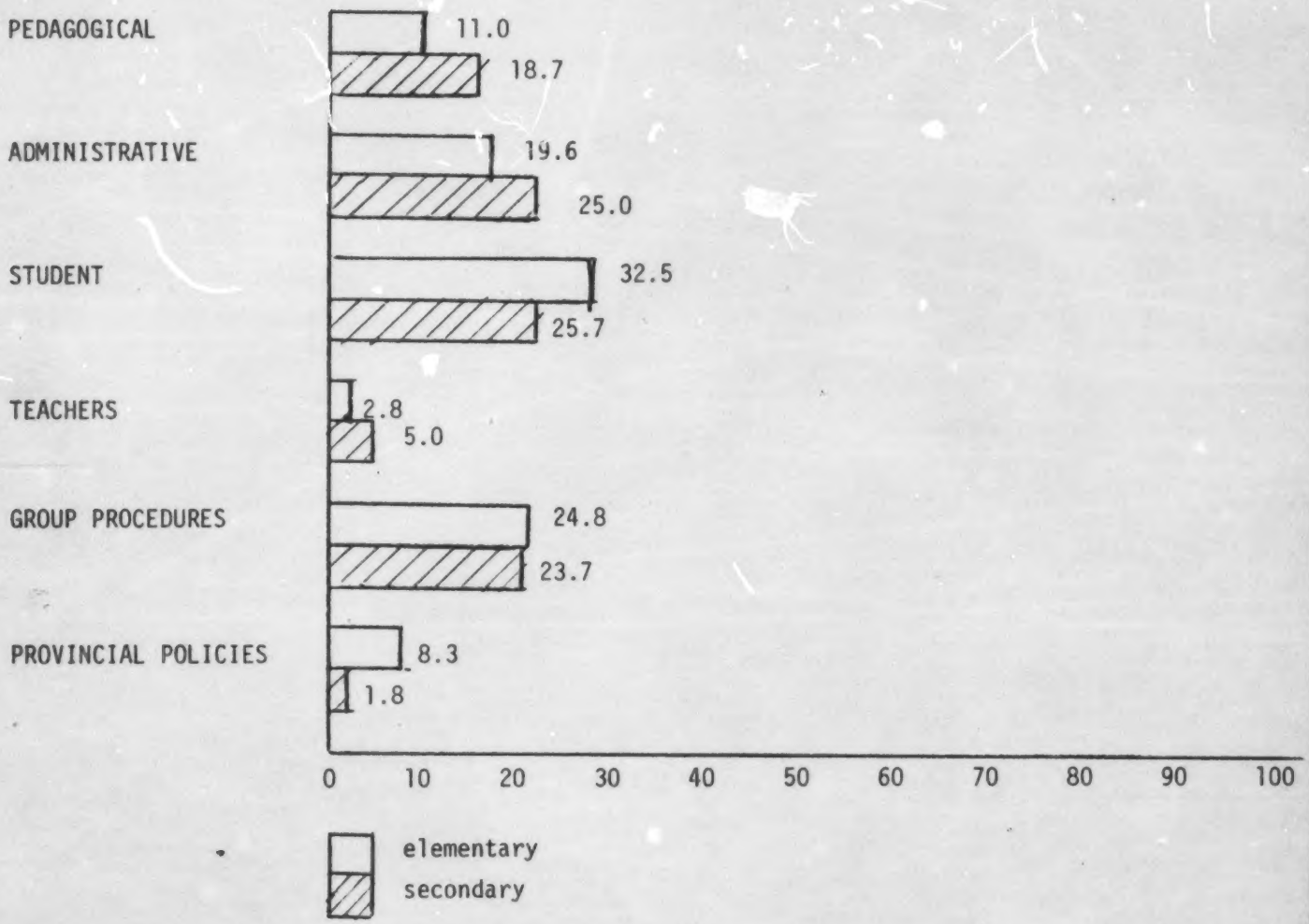
Figure 1 summarizes the results for the six main types of concerns which were dealt with in the school committee meetings. Student-related concerns (e.g., social activities, discipline, health and safety, student field trips) constituted the largest proportion of entries in both the elementary (32.5%) and secondary (25.7%) school committees. At the elementary level, the larger proportion was accounted for by fund-raising activities directly associated with student concerns.

The other prominent areas of school committee activity were concerned with group procedural matters, non-pedagogical administrative concerns, and pedagogical concerns. Thus, nearly one-quarter of the entries in both the elementary and secondary school committees were in fact concerned with the operation of the committees themselves -- for example, with the giving of internal reports, the establishment of meeting dates, the appointment of sub-committees, and the like. Similarly, administrative procedural matters (e.g., regarding physical plant, bussing, scheduling) constituted 19.2% of the entries at the elementary level and a higher 25% of the entries at the secondary level. With regard to pedagogical concerns, which dealt largely with programs and evaluation, the entries in the secondary committees were again larger (18.7%) in comparison with those in the elementary committees (11%). The differences in these latter two areas may reflect the usually more complex administrative operation and academic program of the secondary school.

FIGURE I

Content of Entries: Percentage for Six Main Types of Concerns

(Elementary total entries = 672; Secondary total entries = 346)



Content of Entries in Relation to Legislated Roles

In dealing with the above content issues, to what degree were the school committees involved in gathering and receiving information, in activating community interest and involvement, and in actually consulting with school authorities? This second level of analysis translates content into action.

I. The Informational Role

As pointed out in the description of the PAC legislation in Quebec, the developmental process envisioned for parental participation is based upon the establishment of informed parent committees. Subsequently, according to this reasoning, such committees will be able to serve as a means for informing and activating the wider community, and, finally, they will be able to offer meaningful advice to the school authorities.

From the results summarized in Figure 2 it would seem that the basic informational role has been more than fulfilled in the case of the school committees surveyed in this study. In the elementary school committees 75.4% of the total activities were of an informational nature, and in the secondary school committees the figure was even higher at 86.4%. In relation to the content areas summarized in Figure 1, this means that from 75 to 100% of the activities were of an informational nature. The only exception was student related concerns at the elementary level, where as indicated previously, fund raising was an important component.

II. The Community Interest and Involvement Role

At least with respect to information "bulk", the school committees surveyed in this study seemed to be fulfilling the initial role of becoming informed about the schools. The remaining proportions of entries in Figure 2 point out, however, that relatively little activity was evident with regard to the subsequent roles. Concerning the Community Interest and Involvement role, three relevant areas of activity were identified in the analysis of

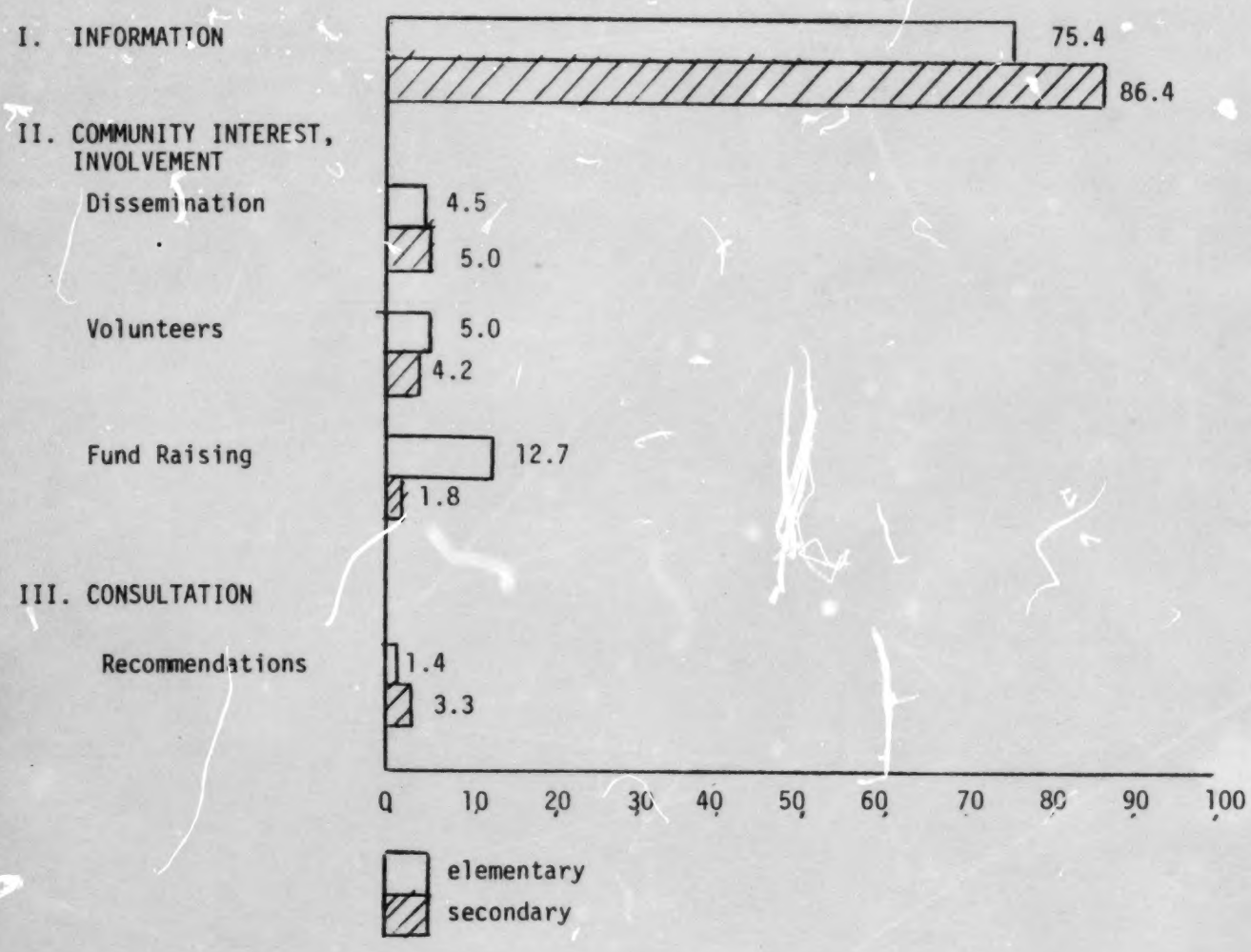
the school committee minutes: Dissemination, Parent Volunteers, and Fund Raising. Dissemination, as noted previously, relates specifically to the role of activating community interest and involvement, and is concerned with past, present, or projected efforts to communicate with parents outside of those who are school committee members. Parent Volunteer and fund-raising activities were included in relation to this role because of their implications for directly involving parents in the support of the school.

Specific dissemination efforts constituted a small percentage of the total activities in both the elementary school committees (4.5%) and the secondary school committees (5%). Parent volunteer activities also constituted a small percentage of total activities in both the elementary school committees (5%) and the secondary school committees (4.2%). Of the three activity areas associated with the promotion of community interest and involvement, fund-raising accounted for the largest percentage of committee activities, at least at the elementary level. In comparison, with the 1.8% evident in the case of secondary school committees, elementary school committees were involved in fund raising (associated with student concerns such as field trips) to the extent of 12.7% of their total activities.

FIGURE 2

Percentage of Entries in Relation to Legislated Roles

(Elementary total entries = 672; Secondary total entries = 346)



III. The Consultation Role

Two sources of data were used to assess the degree to which school committees were involved in providing "meaningful advice to school administrators and school boards". The first was based upon the assumption that consultation would be expressed in terms of specific recommendations by the school committee, and is summarized in Figure 2. The second was based upon the assumption that consultation would be reflected in the degree to which parents initiate activities in the school committees, and is summarized in Figure 3.

(1) Recommendations

Concerning specific recommendations made by school committees, Figure 2 points out that this was the smallest area of activity in the case of elementary school committees (1.4% of total activities); and the second smallest area of activity in the case of secondary school committees (3.3% of total activities).

(2) Initiators of School Committee Activities

As to the question of who initiates school committee activities, the results in Figure 3 leave little doubt that the single most important source in both school levels was the school administration. In the elementary school committees the school administrators were responsible for 42.3% of the total initiations. In the secondary school committees however, the proportion was substantially higher; secondary school administrators were responsible for 66.1% of the total initiations.

Concerning the role of other non-voting members of the school committee, 24.9% of all initiations in the elementary school committees were made by such members in comparison with 11.9% at the secondary level, indicating that elementary school committees may be making more use of external sources of information. What is particularly interesting to note, however, is the predominance of non-voting members which results when the two non-voting categories (Administrator and Other Non-Voting Members) are combined. On this basis,

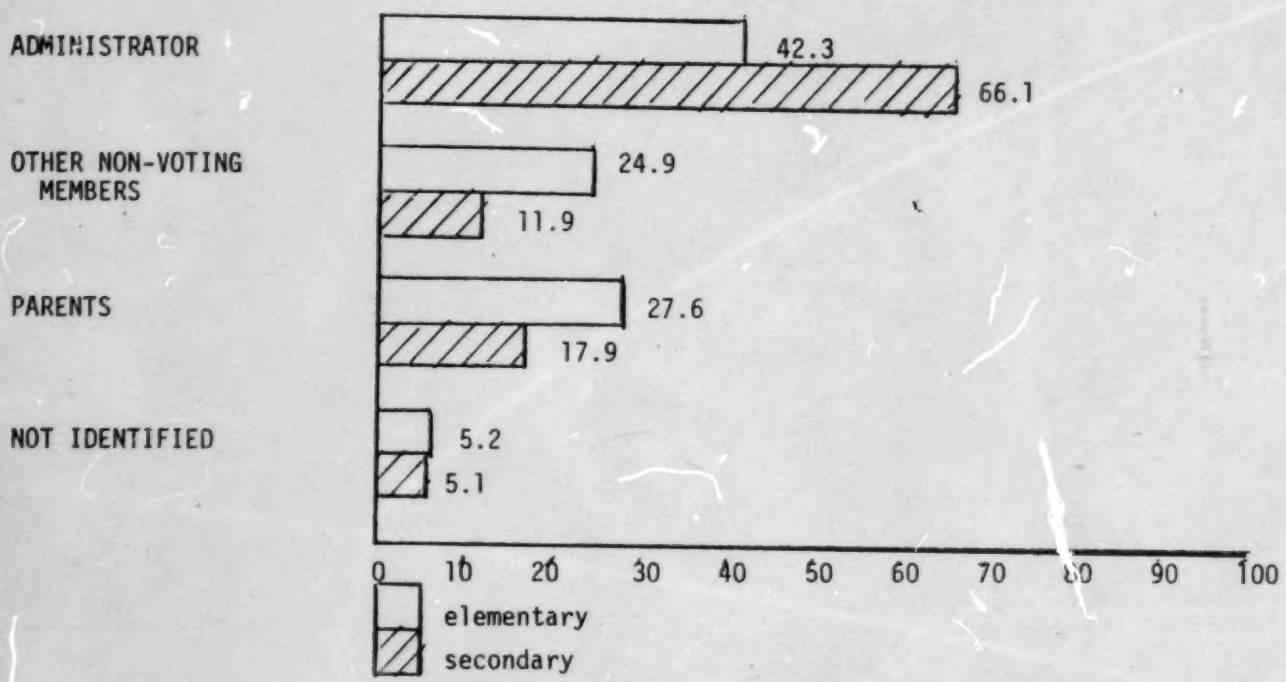
non-voting members as a whole were responsible for 67.2% of all initiations in the elementary school committees and for 78% of all initiations in the secondary school committees.

Finally, with regard to the involvement of parents themselves, the results indicated that parent members of elementary school committees were considerably more active in initiating activities (27.6% of total initiations) than parent members of secondary school committees (17.0% pf total initiations). Initiations in the area of student concerns (notably visits - exchanges), and provincial policy issues accounted for the larger proportion of parent member initiations at the elementary level.

FIGURE 3

Percentage of Entries According to Initiators of Activities

(Elementary total entries = 437; Secondary total entries = 281)



## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

With any public legislation the classical political question concerns the degree to which the outcomes reflect the intentions of the legislators. The question arises, first, because the intentions are usually not that clear either to the legislators themselves or to those responsible for interpreting the language of the legislation; and, second and most important, because the legislation is "filtered" through the values, interests, experiences, and capabilities of those responsible for its implementation.

In applying this question to Quebec's mandated system of parent advisory committees, this study referred first to the controversy associated with the interpretation of the legislation. By definition, a law imposes restrictions upon actions, and this feature of the parent committee legislation might be interpreted as an ultimate extension of governmental control over parent initiative. While parents, for example, are given the right to influence educational decision-making, the law makes it clear that "rational" persuasion rather than inducement or coercion (cf. Gamson, 1968) shall be the acceptable process of influence. However, the law does provide a relatively clear, though cautious, direction for the development of parent involvement: first, the parent committees shall become informed; next they shall activate the interest and involvement of the wider community through information dissemination; and finally, they shall provide school authorities with meaningful advice for educational decision-making.

How has this process "filtered" down to the operational level? Using a year's minutes as the data source, the study analyzed the activities of a sample of 11 school committees, consisting of seven elementary and four secondary school committees. In essence, the results indicated that the roles of the committees have been largely confined to the initial informational stage. By far the largest proportion of the minutes was concerned with gathering and receiving information, but largely in relation to procedural-maintenance

matters, including the operation of the committees themselves and the administrative (non-pedagogical) operation of the school. Subsequent dissemination of information in the interests of the second role of the committee (activating community involvement and interest) accounted for only about 5% of the activities of the committees. The only aspect of this role which demonstrated a substantial amount of activity (12.7%) was fund-raising in the elementary school committees, a traditional function of parent associations. Concerning actual consultation with school authorities, the number of recommendations made by the committees was used as an index of the materialization of this role, and the results indicated that this was the smallest area of committee activity, accounting for only 1.4% and 3.3% of the content of activities in elementary and secondary school committees respectively.

Another index which was applied for this purpose was the degree to which parent members themselves initiated activities in the school committees. That is, it was assumed that an actual consultative role would be indicated by parents raising and pursuing issues relatively independently of the school authorities. In fact, the results indicated the clear dominance of the latter in the affairs of the committees. School administrators alone accounted for over 66% of the initiations in the secondary school committees. In the elementary school committees, there was a broader distribution of initiators including 42.3% for the administrators and 27.6% for the parent members; but if all non-voting members including administrators are combined in this distribution, the result is that 67.2% of the total initiations are by non-voting members. In the secondary school committees the corresponding figure for total non-voting members was 78%.

While this study was exploratory in methodology and in sample size, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Quebec's legislated parent advisory committees are operating much in the familiar manner of the "professionally-led"

parent-teacher association. If they bore some resemblance to the "issue-oriented" community educational interest group (CEIG) referred to at the beginning of this paper, then much more evidence of independence of action and even occasional strong opposition would be expected. Instead, it appears that they are receiving a good deal of information, but largely about procedural matters, and largely by way of the school authorities. It appears, too, that the information is essentially non-controversial. At least it may be speculated that one of the reasons for the lack of recommendations is that parents are receiving information which simply doesn't generate parent reaction in the form of recommended changes. It is significant, too, that dissemination activity on the part of the committees is minimal, for the implication is that parent groups are not building constituents in the community which would provide the support for a more independent role in consulting with school authorities.

This study has not dealt with the broader issues of whether we should be concerned with promoting "advocate" associations of parents, posing some discomforts for school authorities, or whether we should try to maintain the generally supportive tradition of "professionally-led influence structures." Instead, it has looked at a law, and has found that the law is not being implemented according to intentions. Anomalies within the law itself may be partly responsible for this situation. Can parent associations be "cooperative" and "complementary" and at the same time be expected to be sources of meaningful input into educational decision-making? If the choice is for more advocacy on the part of parents, occasional non-cooperation would seem to be one of the costs entailed. Indeed, if legislators were concerned with promoting parent advocacy, it would seem that some resources for "non-cooperation" -- e.g., provision for independent access to information and for independent, professional advocates on behalf of parent groups -- would have to be included in the legislation. This in turn would involve costs

but whatever the method used, legislated or otherwise, the present conceptualization of parental involvement seems to be that only benefits should be experienced by the authorities.

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